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TS# 142299

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

1 May 1961

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Probable Reactions to the Positioning of US Combat Forces in South Vietnam and Thailand

1. Speaking broadly, we think that the positioning of US combat forces in South Vietnam and Thailand would not in the short term precipitate reactions which would be strongly adverse or dangerous to US interests. Much would depend on the announced purpose of the action and the circumstances surrounding the actual positioning of the forces, but under the most likely circumstances we can envision we think that: (a) the reaction of the neutrals and our allies would range from approval to grudging acceptance and respect for US strength and determination; and (b) the reaction of the Communist Bloc would not include a recourse to force.

2. Given certain conditions, we believe that the proposed action could in the short term produce reactions favorable to US interests. Chief among these essential conditions are: (a) a credible invitation from South Vietnam and Thailand for the stationing of US forces in their countries; (b) a clearly delineated

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mission for the forces within the countries, providing for harmonious relations with the populace and the indigenous forces; and (c) a smooth and successful operation in installing and maintaining the forces.

3. Assuming that the requisite invitation was forthcoming from Thailand, we can foresee no inherent obstacles to establishing the above conditions in Thailand. In South Vietnam, however, many obvious difficulties emerge. Because of the lack of security in the countryside US forces would probably become harassed and engaged before they could be positioned. Moreover, communications and supply for the forces would probably be subject to continued harassment, thus deflecting the forces from their declared mission. Finally, if the mission given these forces was to seal South Vietnamese borders off from guerrilla encroachment from Laos and Cambodia, successful accomplishment of this mission would be most difficult.

4. The positioning of US forces immediately south of the DMZ at the 17th Parallel -- for the declared purpose of protecting South Vietnam from Viet Minh attack -- would confront the Communist Bloc, particularly the Chinese, with the most direct challenge of any we can foresee in this proposed action. The reaction would of course be violent, but we believe that the interplay of

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conflicting interests among North Vietnam, Communist China, and the USSR would probably be effective in preventing a recourse to overt force on the part of the Bloc or any single member.

5. The long-term consequences of the proposed action are impossible to foresee with confidence. We could expect, however, that any initial enthusiasm on the part of the hosts or our allies would dissipate in a relatively short time. The problem of disengaging US forces in circumstances suggesting the completion of a successful operation, might be difficult to achieve. However, if the action in South Vietnam had permitted Diem's forces to concentrate on security operations and if these operations had resulted in reducing markedly the Communist strength in South Vietnam, then great credit and heightened respect would be accorded the US, however critical the reaction had previously been.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

ABBOT SMITH
Acting Chairman

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